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AID OR BUSINESS?: THE TRANSFORMATION OF HUMANITARIAN WORK IN THE REFUGEE CAMP IN SLAVONSKI BROD *(Translation)*

ROMANA POZNIAK
Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies
Šubićeva 42,
HR – 10 000 Zagreb, Croatia
romanapozniak@ief.hr
iD orcid.org/0000-0002-5575-8762

This paper will present the starting points for the interpretation of the transformation of humanitarian work, along with providing examples indicative of its professionalisation and the close relationship it has developed with the domain of political activity. Originally conceived as a philanthropic project and based around the imperative of saving lives and/or reducing suffering, humanitarianism has formalised the concept of providing aid in the past few decades and has begun to manifest aspects typical of corporate and business culture. The practice of professionalisation and the relationship between the two terms seemingly presenting contradictory attitudes towards humanitarian work – seeing it as either aid or business – are problematised on the basis of the ethnography of work and an analysis of the interviews conducted with humanitarian workers from the refugee camp in Slavonski Brod.

Key words: *humanitarian work, humanitarianism, refugee camp, aid, business*

INTRODUCTION – ON HUMANITARIAN PRACTICES AND REFUGENESS[1]

      Certain studies (see, for example, Hameršak and Pleše 2017b; Petrović 2016, 2017) have already warned of the ambivalent, yet simultaneously, and surprisingly, harmonious relationship between the humanitarian interpretations of refugeness and ones which choose to look at it from the perspective of security. Media reports covering

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natural disasters, wars and other humanitarian crises most often feature depictions of immediate suffering in order to confront their audience with the horrific consequences of such events. Regardless of whether these may be seen as individual representations or consistent reporting, photos showing starving children, corpses in bombed-out ruins, people fleeing their homes, boats full of refugees, and other images depicting "the pain of others" (Sontag 2005) are part of the humanitarian toolbox and are used to incite empathy and a feeling of shame in the global public, sometimes even becoming a call to responsibility (Weiss 2013). However, these methods are also used to promote the humanitarian agencies which arrive at the site of the event first and assume the role of aid providers to the victims of violence. At the same time, the media portrays an image of migrants, refugees and asylm seekers[2] as a threat to security, oftentimes suspecting them of taking advantage of the asylum system and accusing them of undermining national sovereignty. As numerous examples have demonstrated,[3] the practice of criminalisation and the arbitrary application of laws pertaining to refugeness and irregular migration at the political level have made the construction of the imagery of a threatening foreigner a common practice (cf. Pozniak and Petrović 2014).

Other than the public domain and the world of media, the humanitarian-securitarian view of the refugee question is also reflected in the overall legal framework which aims to regulate the issue of contemporary forced and irregular migration. Asylum and migration policies bring forth an ambivalent view of refugeness, with security measures targeting refugees as objects of control, and humanitarian measures treating them as the objects of care (cf. Malkki 1985, according to Malkki 1992). The two-dimensional representation of refugees neglects the wide range of circumstances and personal histories which shape particular cases of migration. Furthermore, the security-based interpretation of

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[2] This paper does not aim to tackle the categorisation of refugeness and migration, nor will it engage with the problematisation of their potential limitations. It is only important to note that all three terms – migrant, refugee and asylum seeker – emerge as the discursive practice of the legal and political system which regulates the phenomena of refugeness and migration. Along with the aforementioned, the influence of the humanitarian aspects considered in the paper also significantly contributes to the definition of these terms.

[3] A large number of media outlets and non-governmental organisations have reported on police violence and the pushbacks of asylum seekers at the border between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. For example, this issue has been covered in two articles published in the Guardian: "'They didn't give a damn': first footage of Croatian police 'brutality'" (https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/nov/14/didnt-give-a-damn-refugees-film-croatian-police-brutality-bosnia) and "Croatia violating EU law by sending asylum seekers back to Bosnia"(https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/dec/17/croatia-violating-eu-law-by-sending-back-asylum-seekers-to-bosnia); and in the online report of Human Rights Watch "Croatia: Migrants Pushed Back to Bosnia and Herzegovina" (https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/12/11/croatia-migrants-pushed-back-bosnia-and-herzegovina).

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refugeness may make the denial of rights or the hindering of access to rights appear justified, while, on the other hand, the humanitarian interpretation paints helplessness as a feature of refugeness, which is why the provision of aid is seen as a necessity, and refugees are depicted as nameless victims who, in the absence of control over their own lives, are mere passive receivers of humanitarian relief (cf. Malkki 1996). The practice of "humanitarian-securitarian management" (Hameršak and Pleše 2017b:120) is evident in the work of the Winter Reception and Transit Centre of the Republic of Croatia in Slavonski Brod, and the example of the Centre will be used to analyse the transformations and contradictions of the phenomenon of humanitarian work.

While the biopolitical interpretation of refugeness is not the subject of this paper, it is important, for the purposes of understanding the recent discussions of humanitarian work, to point one's attention to the fact that the critique of humanitarianism most often stems from the biopolitical view of contemporary social and political processes. This critique mostly deals with the general apolitical nature of humanitarianism, whereby, amid concerns for the bare lives of refugees, they are also deprived of any sort of political meaning. In this regard, we can speak of the depoliticisation of the phenomenon of refugeness. However, humanitarianism simultaneously appears as one of the guiding principles of international politics, which is also the fact from which, paradoxically, its inherently political character emerges (Barnett 2005, 2010, 2011; Fassin 2007, 2012; Petrović 2016). It should also be remarked that humanitarian politics create an asymmetrical relationship between humanitarian workers and refugees – namely, one in which refugees become "clients of those upon whom they are dependent for the means of survival and security" (Harrell-Bond 2002:55). Similarly, along with creating an image of the refugees as helpless victims, this also helps portray the humanitarian workers as selfless helpers (cf. Malkki 2015). Liisa Malkki (2015) has warned that this issue demands an approach which would go beyond such a binary division, while Miriam Ticktin (2014) believes that a significant contribution could be made by ethnographies covering the transformation of humanitarianism and the complexity of the growing humanitarian sector. I find their arguments important for two specific reasons. Firstly, it is essential to bring humanitarian work aimed at refugees into connection with the phenomenon of the securitisation of refugeness and migration, while also keeping in mind that migration and asylum policies are affected by the dynamic between the humanitarian domain and the domain of security, and that these two domains are part of the same wider system. Secondly, the policies of humanitarianism are, for the most part, analysed from the perspective of refugee studies, rather than labour studies. This is why I am trying to start a discussion on the transformations of humanitarian work in the context of ongoing (neo)liberalisation, and I aim to do so by looking at the example of the work performed in the refugee camp of the "Croatian section of the Balkan corridor" (Hameršak and Pleše 2017a) in 2015 and 2016.

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As my goal is to conduct a detailed analysis of professional humanitarian work, I will begin by problematising the concept of humanitarianism, after which I will describe the starting points for understanding its transformations; finally, I plan to present the insight gained through the ethnography of the work performed in the Winter Reception and Transit Centre for migrants in Slavonski Brod, along with providing an analysis from the perspective of cultural anthropology of the experience of working with refugees, which will be based on six semi-structured interviews conducted with the camp staff. As I have personally spent several years volunteering and working with refugees and asylum seekers, prior to conducting the interviews, I was familiar with the way in which the humanitarian sector operates. The ethnography of work as presented in this paper is a direct result of my work and volunteer experience, accompanied by the simultaneous application of the research methods of cultural anthropology (namely, participant observation). The specificity of this position and, by extension, of the scientific impressions of the structure and semiotics of the humanitarianism in the camp in Slavonski Brod are both subject to the process of surmounting these two, at first glance opposed, positions which I had found myself in with regard to the transit of refugees through Croatia – namely, that of a worker and that of a researcher. In other words, this (auto)ethnography of humanitarian work is what come out of the juxtaposition of these two positions. Having initially joined the relief effort as a volunteer, I was given a paid position at a non-governmental organisation[4] stationed in the camp a little over a month after the start of what the media dubbed "the refugee crisis". In line with my previously stated intention of using the ethnography of work to analyse my work and research experience, I will attempt to examine the ways in which the camp operated, while also retrospectively considering my own impressions, insight and everyday work life. I would, however, like to point out that I had no clearly defined intentions as a researcher when I first began my engagement. These were mostly formed during, and after, my time at the camp, as I began to identify the need for addressing the key prerequisites for understanding contemporary humanitarianism as influenced by the business models of the neoliberal economy, along with the need to examine its manifestations at the micro-level of the Slavonski Brod refugee camp. The interviews were conducted at a later date, and all participants were then properly informed about the goals and subject of the study.

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[4] Taking into account the significant level of discretion required in this case, and the restrictions presently in place with regard to the release of information obtained through working in the humanitarian sector, as well as my own attempts at distinguishing between my organisational and scientific work, I shall refrain from naming the agency or programme through which I was employed. Rather than focusing on a particular humanitarian organisation, the insight and the results obtained through this study reflect a more general critique of contemporary humanitarianism, while also looking at its administrative and management mechanisms in the specific context of the refugee camp in Slavonski Brod.

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THE CONCEPTUALISATION OF *HUMANITARIANISM* AND SOME OF ITS HISTORICAL ORIGINS

Humanitarianism primarily refers to the need, but also the duty, of helping suffering groups or individuals. It is most often understood as compassion, charity or simply as the selfless act of helping others (cf. Malkki 2015; Ticktin 2014). Generally speaking, different approaches to relieving suffering are something with which past generations have been well acquainted. For example, many religions placed great emphasis on the issue of human misfortune, whereby they attempted to relieve said misfortune through mourning rituals or theological musings on pain and martyrdom (Bornstein and Redfield 2010:7). However, in the past few decades, we have witnessed the creation of new interpretations and rules which aim to present natural disasters and civilian victims of armed conflict as "humanitarian crises", and an ever-growing number of intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations providing relief to the victims of such crises (ibid.:3-4) has been subject to the process of transformation into the aid industry (cf. Duffield 2012). In her search for an appropriate definition of humanitarianism, Ticktin (2014) has warned that this phenomenon cannot be simply defined, seeing that we are dealing with an ethos that can be perceived as a set of emotions on the one hand, and a set of rules on the other. It is an ambivalent structure which simultaneously functions as "a moral imperative to intervene, and a form of government" (ibid.:274). Barnett believes that humanitarianism, once limited to the provision of aid in emergency situations, has now become much like communism, nationalism and liberalism, a project which aims to transform the world we live in (2005:733). Contemporary, postmodern humanitarianism differs from its traditional form in the sense that it is now becoming more and more associated with the domain of politics (Petrović 2016), and, as I will demonstrate at a later point, this can be best observed by looking at the development of non-governmental, international and intergovernmental humanitarian organisations.

In my attempt to more clearly determine the origins of humanitarianism and its transformation in the contemporary context, I made use of the works of Michael Barnett (2005, 2010, 2011), a researcher and theoretician of international relations, and the insight into the history and transformations of the humanitarian sector he expressed therein. The origins of the *international humanitarian order* can be traced to a "mix of technological, economic, religious, and ideological changes of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries" (Barnett 2010:3). In a more narrow sense, the abolitionism of the 19th century was the precursor to the founding of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the establishment of international humanitarian law, with these two serving as the basis which later helped create the norms, institutions and organisations devoted to the protection of human lives in the 20th century (ibid.). Groups akin to

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the non-governmental organisations of today participated in the leading oppositional movement which advocated for the abolition of slavery in Great Britain, after which they were able to extend their mandate to include the abolition of slavery in other countries as well (Werker and Ahmed 2008:4).

While there are many historical moments which helped guide the development of humanitarianism in one way or another, the events in Europe after World War Two and the founding of the United Nations have most certainly changed the nature of international relations, and have helped pave the way for the reinterpretation of humanitarian practice in general. Hardt and Negri see the UN as the starting point which provided the legal basis for the later occurrence of the supranational state of international relations (2010:17-19). The domain of human rights, which gained mainstream recognition after the war, follows the principle of universality and consigns the central position to the individual – and by doing so, it contributes to the mitigation of the existing political and power relations. Along with being human-oriented, this approach goes beyond the traditional left-right division, while the focus on objective and universal values encourages the development of an international community (Barnett 2011:167). Numerous international organisations have been established through the United Nations, and many organisations which had previously been involved in the provision of aid in emergency situations have taken on the discourse of "rights" and have slowly begun to advocate for structural social change, which will be discussed in more detail later on. Although it would still be incorrect to say that humanitarian work, development and human rights are identical domains in practice, the atmosphere around the wide dissemination of universal rights and progressive ideas which the UN has confidently promoted (and continues to promote) has brought them closer together in many ways, as is particularly evident in the discourse of contemporary humanitarianism (cf. Barnett 2005, 2011).

It is estimated that there were 30 million people in Europe after World War Two whose status could be described as refugees, which was one of the reasons for the founding of UNHCR (a specialised agency for refugees) and the adoption of the 1951 Refugee Convention. However, the Convention only concerned the European refugee crisis, and it was not until the 1967 Protocol that the definition expanded to include refugees at the global level (Petrović 2016:289–290). Organisations like UNHCR, which had previously focused on the provision of aid to European refugees and post-war reconstruction, expanded their field of activity in the second half of the 20th century beyond Europe, to the former colonial world and new, emerging political communities. In this way, humanitarianism became a global phenomenon (Barnett 2011), and the "fate of the non-industrialized world was the subject of intense negotiations" (Escobar 1995:31). Concepts like the *Third World* and *underdevelopment* emerged as the products of the aforementioned post-war atmosphere, bringing with them the notion

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of *three worlds* - namely, one consisting of free industrialised nations, state-socialist industrialised nations and non-industrial nations (representing the First, Second and Third World; ibid.). Although they began to expand globally, international humanitarian and developmental policies of the second half of the 20th century were also dependant on the pressures and interests of Cold War relations. However, after 1989, liberalisation experienced an upsurge, as it was now given access to the territory of the post-socialist states. Western countries and international organisations welcomed the coming age of international liberalism and economic globalisation (Barnett 2011). As I will show in the following section, this was also when new interpretations of humanitarianism and the redefinition of the work of both existing and new organisations came to be.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF HUMANITARIAN WORK

In the past, the term "humanitarian aid" was used to describe the heroic deeds of but a few organisations or initiatives, e.g. that of the protagonists of the rescue worker profession such as the International Red Cross, Save the Children, CARE or Oxfam, which had dutifully adhered to the four basic principles of humanitarian activity: humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence (Barnett 2005, 2011; Weiss 2013). The aforementioned principles were used, and continue to be used today, as guidelines that would help organisations knowingly distance themselves from potential political interpretations of their mission. Advocating for universal humanity and striving towards impartial, non-political activity helped increase one's chances for gaining access to numerous emergency situations, including those which resulted from political instability or armed conflict. Taking sides in a conflict, public advocacy, criticism directed towards a particular political option or just the appearance of political bias could hinder one's capacity to act and make access to victims impossible in a situation where the (direct or indirect) provision of aid to victims is the main purpose guiding the work of the majority of humanitarian organisations (Barnett 2011). However, in the 1990s, the structure of non-profit humanitarian organisations and the logic behind humanitarian activity changed substantially.

At the end of the 20th century, humanitarianism became its own distinctive domain – one which demands the specific knowledge of professionals, along with encouraging interaction and the exchange of information between its own members, who share a collective awareness of the fact that what they are involved in constitutes a joint enterprise (Barnett 2005:729). The domain of humanitarian work was now defined as an area of expertise, thus requiring the adoption of norms and rules which would help more clearly define the approach to work and the business processes of this emerging

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discipline. In the context of her questioning of the role of civil society, Kamat points out that civil society emerged as a separate political actor in the international discourse of development after the Cold War and the establishment of the global free market (Kamat 2004:157). In accordance with the aforementioned, she believes that the development and professionalisation of many non-governmental organisations should be analysed together with the global economic and political processes which are restructuring the concepts of public good and private interest (ibid.:156). This new situation, which appeared alongside the ideas driving the neoliberal economic reforms of the post-Cold War era (Kamat 2004), is refered to by Barnett (2005) as the transformation of humanitarianism. They are defined by two fundamental features: politicisation and institutionalisation.

One of the more important factors which surely affected the politicisation of humanitarianism is the political economy of the financing of non-governmental organisations. The amount of grants made to NGOs has grown significantly in a monetary sense, while the donation policy began to promote a competitive entrepreneurial attitude among non-profits and philanthropists. Furthermore, the most common donors are usually states, making the financing of individual organisations or humanitarian activities in certain areas inevitably susceptible to the interests and foreign policy of donors states. It can, therefore, be concluded that collaboration with states has, amid the circumstances marking the transformation of the corpus of charitable organisations, now become accepted as an important factor in the operation of the humanitarian sector (cf. Barnett 2005, 2011). As I have previously mentioned, many humanitarian organisations have now broadened the scope of their activities to include development programmes and human rights. This means that organisations which had previously primarily been devoted to saving lives and the provision of necessary aid, and which were, therefore, seen as apolitical, have now taken on the ideas of development and human rights, focusing on the prevention of problems which cause humanitarian crises, on peacebuilding and the promotion of liberal economic models in post-conflict and "underdeveloped" communities. The increasing interaction between different types of agencies working in different sectors has paved the way for the unification of the concepts of aid, rights and development into a discourse of humanitarian activity which has now become closely related to the political processes marking the creation of modern, legitimate, democratic states (Barnett 2005:727).

The institutionalisation of humanitarian work was to a great deal prompted by the challenges which the organisers of humanitarian activities had to face after the implementation of the new efficiency measures, especially in the context of the more demanding donation procedures, which now required that all funds obtained through grants be accounted for. Donors began to implement the principles of new public

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management, requiring that organisations present them with evidence that their money had been spent for appropriate purposes and in an appropriate manner (ibid.:730). As I have previously mentioned, these principles stem from the neoliberal goals of the 1980s: "One of neoliberalism's goals was to reduce the state's role in the delivery of public services and, instead, to rely on commercial and voluntary organizations, which were viewed as more efficient" (ibid.).

Along with creating reporting mechanisms, methods for measuring results and codes of conduct, many organisations redefined their organisational mandates and scopes of activity. Having taken on a niche in the professional crisis relief market, they could now specialise and devote themselves to a specific area of humanitarian aid (e.g. the protection of children, medical aid, food distribution, human rights advocacy, etc.), using this to realise programmes and promote an approach that would set them apart from other humanitarian actors. In the past few decades, humanitarian work has become bureaucratised, organisations have started to compete with one another, and humanitarianism has become a distinct profession and sector of the labour market.[5]

Up until the 1990s, non-governmental organisations operated within a slower system of work and had to manage with staff which had most likely only started receiving training in the course of performing the job itself. However, some of the more prominent organisations in the field can now boast a more influential position, one which comes with the capacity to offer assistance and additional training to a large number of educated and specialised professionals, whenever and wherever it may be required (ibid.:723). For example, the organisation Doctors Without Borders was founded in a Parisian flat in the 1970s – in a little over three decades, it has grown into an international network spanning 19 independent departments, with programmes in more than 70 countries, 2000 international and 15 000 local employees, and a yearly budget which amounted to USD 703 million in 2006 (Barnett 2005:723; Bornstein and Redfield 2010:19). In the same year, the budget of the International Red Cross was USD 771 million, and of UNHCR USD 1154 million (Bornstein and Redfield 2010:18). The yearly budget of UNHCR grew to a staggering USD 3.5 billion in 2012 (Weiss 2013:35).

By the start of the 21st century, the need for a more precise definition of work, efficient procedures, and new protocols for acting in emergency situations became evident. Along with the assumed goal of protecting the end-beneficiary, i.e. the receiver of aid, the adoption of numerous guidelines and the reinterpretation of the organisations'

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[5] A representative example of the trend towards the formation of a distinct humanitarian profession is the online portal *reliefweb,* available at https://reliefweb.int/. Along with providing news and useful information from the world of humanitarianism, this portal has a specific section for job-seekers, offering daily recruitment updates for jobs with various humanitarian organisations working on missions in almost every part of the world.

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mandate were also used as methods for protecting the organisations themselves and their reputation (cf. Barnett 2010). On the other hand, in the context of the development of the non-profit sector, donors began to provide an ever-increasing amount of funds to a larger number of organisations, expecting efficient distribution of aid and truthful reporting in return (cf. Barnett 2005).

In an environment which has been shaped by the new definitions of humanitarianism, the "commodification of humanitarian values" (Slim 1997, according to Barnett 2011:216), and the increasingly popular models repurposed from the business sector (which humanitarianism embraced fully), aid receivers became similar to consumers, whose rights can be compared to the contractual obligations agreed upon by the contractor and the service provider, except in the part pertaining to the right to complain in case of failure on behalf of the service (aid) provider (Barnett 2011:214). As Barnett concludes, this is a situation which is ripe with irony. At the same time when it has found itself associated with politics, humanitarianism has also become professionalised and has begun to implement these newly established rules. Paradoxically, this manoeuvre has left the impression of depoliticisation, thereby downplaying the importance of history and the power relations which originally caused the suffering, while politics came to be seen as a technique which can help expand and realise humanitarian programmes (ibid.:213).

THE STRUCTURE AND POLITICS OF THE SLAVONSKI BROD REFUGEE CAMP

As I have mentioned previously, in the autumn of 2015 I began working at a non-profit organisation which was at that time working on the implementation of a humanitarian programme[6] in the Winter Reception and Transit Centre in Slavonski Brod. I stayed in the camp from December of 2015 until April of 2016. The insight I gained through my research, as well as my own impressions, confirmed that the political and economic

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[6] In the so-called NGO containers in the "office" section of the camp, numerous international and local non-governmental organisations had set up shop. Some of them primarily considered themselves to be humanitarian organisations, e.g. the Croatian Red Cross, which was in charge of co-ordinating and distributing humanitarian aid. Certain activists non-governmental organisations also joined the activities at the camp, e.g. the Centre for Peace Studies and the then-founded citizens' initiative Welcome!. Among other humanitarian organisations present at the site, one should mention CARITAS, Humanitarian Association Remar Croatia, Croatian Law Center (HPC), Croatian Association of Court Interpreters (HSUST), Samaritan's Purse, the Jesuit Refugee Service, the Baptist Union of Croatia, Save the Children and MAGNA, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency and the Intereuropean Human Aid Association. Along with non-governmental organisations, UN agencies such as UNHCR and UNICEF (together with their partner

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aspects of humanitarianism greatly defined the dynamic of work in this particular camp. The adoption of business procedures in accordance with the transformation of humanitarianism which I described in the preceding chapter, the commodification of humanitarian aid and the process of surmounting the contradiction between aid and business have proven to be the most pronounced facets of work at the refugee camp.

First of all, one should keep in mind the well-known fact that the city of Slavonski Brod has been facing high unemployment rates and labour emigration for many years, and that about one hundred locals were employed at the camp during these five to six months. The total number of humanitarian workers from November of 2015 to March of 2016 (when the Balkan corridor was closed)[7] ranged from 200 to 300 daily.[8] A part of the staff who were recruited locally was employed through the government "public works" scheme and were working on a minimum wage, which was in some cases the only source of household income. Co-workers on the team included several nurses who could not find employment, or who had been waiting for months to complete their mandatory practical training at one of the local hospitals. Along with locals, the camp

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organisations), and the International Organization for Migration, IOM (which became the UN's agency for migrations in September of 2016) were also present in the Slavonski Brod refugee camp. The organisations divided the work among themselves so that each organisation was in charge of a particular programme (working with children, the distribution of food and clothes, reuniting families, etc.), and so that they would not interfere with each other's area of activity, which left the impression of a highly organised system of humanitarian aid. It was precisely the environment of managerial humanitarianism in Slavonski Brod, as well as the fact that I was also working on the realisation of a programme conducted by an international organisation professionally engaged in humanitarian activity, that sparked my academic interest in the transformations and contradictions of humanitarian work. Accordingly, the interviews and ethnographic analysis which I conducted relate to the professional forms of humanitarianism and the contradictory relation between aid and business which were a key shaping force driving the dynamic and organisation of work in the camp in Slavonski Brod.

[7] The Balkan corridor refers to the refugee corridor coordinated between multiple states which, although adhering to pseudolegal regulations and their constant changes in every participating country (Hameršak and Pleše 2017a:19), allowed for the organised transit of refugees from the Greek-Macedonian border to the Slovenian-Austrian border. In Croatia, this involved the transportation of refugees to Slovenia by train. Although it has not been officially recognised as a humanitarian-transit corridor, it can be concluded that the organised transportation of refugees lasted from mid-September of 2015 to mid-March of 2016, after which the heads of the states comprising the Balkan corridor announced the reinstatement of the Schengen regime and the closing of the humanitarian corridor (Santer and Wriedt 2017:147; for more information on the corridor, see Kasparek 2016). After this, the camp continued to operate until mid-April of 2016, but had, due to the suspension of refugee transit, greatly reduced the number of employees in its last month.

[8] According to the internal records of the regular coordination meetings of the Winter Reception and Transit Centre of the Republic of Croatia.

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staff also included people from other Croatian cities, and even other countries. These people rented hotel rooms, apartments and houses in the city and, logically, used local services and visited local establishments. During that brief time, the refugee camp, although characterised by highly precarious employment, offered financial gain and a "livelier" social life. An interlocutor originating from Slavonski Brod described the state of the city during the time when the refugee camp was operational as follows:

> "Bars were open late – the Beer Pub was open until 4 o'clock in the morning! The owners made a profit... The city somehow came alive at that time, and I could see myself living in a place like that."[9]

From 3 November 2015 to 15 April 2016, the refugee camp in Slavonski Brod provided various forms of refugee transit.[10] The concept of crisis dominated interpretations of the situation, whether it be the refugee, migrant, humanitarian, European asylum system crisis, or any of the other terms which could then be heard coming from academic, humanitarian, activist or governmental discourse. Together with governmental and local services, the organisations operating in the camp used guidelines for conduct in situations of crisis, and the donations and other funds collected for the realisation of different projects were collected on the basis of descriptions which emphasised the urgency of the situation in which the provision of aid and the protection of rights are understood as a necessity. In other words, although the provision of aid was indeed necessary and, in many cases, meant the difference between life and death, such a perspective led to the marginalisation of the political and legal interpretation of the meaning of the humanitarian corridor and the mass refugee transit which we had witnessed in those few months. Seeing that biological life has become the universal principle regulating the politics of humanitarianism (Petrović 2016:322), and that the humanitarian and security practices of the Slavonski Brod refugee camp were interconnected at the systemic level, emphasis was placed on surviving transit, and humanitarian work largely amounted to the impartial provision of aid. In that regard, the state services which were in charge of managing the movement and residency of migrants in Croatia treated the advocacy for asylum rights and the critique of migration policies as threats to the established order

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[9] D. T., 11 November 2018.

[10] For a detailed description of the camp, its mode of operation, and the points of contention noticed by other researchers, refer to the text "Zimski prihvatno-tranzitni centar Republike Hrvatske: etnografsko istraživanje u slavonskobrodskom kampu za izbjeglice" (Hameršak and Pleše 2017b:101–132; Winter Reception and Transit Centre in the Republic of Croatia: An Ethnographic Research in the Slavonski Brod Refugee Camp). For accounts about the forced stops and longer or shorter incarcerations in the Slavonski Brod refugee camp which point to the fact that it had exclusively transit function for only a short period of time (Hameršak and Pleše 2017a:25), see ibid. 24-34.

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of the camp. Considering these circumstances, all the organisations participating in the humanitarian programmes had to carefully choose their position and take into account the behaviour of their staff so that they would not challenge the existing hierarchy, and thereby risk getting banned from working at the camp. Paradoxically, this meant that the organisations had to use politics and their relationship with the state to create an apolitical code of conduct. In the course of this process, the staff was constantly under pressure with regard to the potential consequences of breaking the rules or acting in a way not envisaged by the protocol, even when doing so would be in the best interest of the people in the refugee camp.

A good example of the aforementioned contradictions was the restriction of access to one of the sectors containing the camp's accommodation units, followed by the later ban on the provision of useful information to migrants who were incarcerated in the first and third sector. On one occasion, the coordinator of the programme to which I was assigned returned from one of the regular coordination meetings and told us that the Ministry of Interior of the RC had enacted a ban forbidding all employees and volunteers (except for members of the Croatian Red Cross) from approaching the third sector of the camp (in the last months of the camp, the third sector was used to "accommodate" migrants who had found themselves in Croatia after the suspension of the transit through Balkan corridor), with instructions stating that employees and volunteers would not even be allowed to look at the sector from the other side of the surrounding chain-link fence as they made their way around the camp. If the staff did not comply with the instructions, the organisation could be banned from working at the camp, and the employees themselves risked arrest or some other form of punishment, although it was never clarified what sort of punishment this would imply nor which law provided for such a practice. We often commented amongst ourselves about how the centre had set up its own laws and rules, and how it had become a separate world which only us, the humanitarian workers, and the police could comprehend. The restrictions and threats did not stop even after we were allowed access to the third (and later first) sector. We were then instructed not to engage the people who were being held inside the sector and talk to them about the option of formally seeking international protection. Likewise, we were not allowed to inform them of the fact that if they failed to file an asylum request before the camp closes, they would be risking detention and placement in a closed centre – namely, the Reception Centre in Ježevo, also known as the deportation centre. According to unofficial information from the camp, the directive was once again issued by the Ministry of Interior to the representatives of all the organisations present, who had then conveyed the message to their staff. The aid we could provide was restricted to the programme stipulated in our mandate and the organisation's project proposal (e.g. the protection of children, the distribution of clothes, medical care) regardless of whether we could have,

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at this specific moment in time when the camp was about to close, used the information on the asylum system and the operation of the detention centre to better help the people living in the camp. It is apparent from the aforementioned that the implementation of humanitarian programmes in the camp in Slavonski Brod was largely affected by the security aspect of asylum and migration policy, thereby creating a humanitarian-securitarian line of management around which the rules for operation were formed, and in accordance with which the lines, albeit arbitrary, delineating what was permitted and what was prohibited to humanitarian workers were drawn.

THE ECONOMY OF HUMANITARIAN AID

Prior to the closure of the Balkan corridor in March of 2016, several trains and several thousand people would arrive at the camp daily, where they would stay for a brief period and then board a train to Slovenia. The people getting off the train would be checked by the police and the Croatian Red Cross, which would then conduct the initial vulnerability assessment and guide people through the rest of the necessary procedures in the camp. The first among these was registration with the police, i.e. the Ministry of Interior, after which the refugees would be directed to the distribution tent, where international and Croatian non-governmental organisations would give out humanitarian aid. The distribution area was organised according to the "category" of aid provided, with each stall in charge of distributing a specific set of items, e.g. clothes for adults and children, sets for personal hygiene, food for adults and infants, shoes, scarves, hats and gloves, blankets, travel bags, etc. Each stall belonged to a different organisation, and each organisation openly advertised the name of the donor. Members of staff (volunteers and employees of the various humanitarian organisations) had to wear fluorescent vests in the colours of the organisations to which they belonged to. I recall a police officer who jokingly announced "Shopping, shopping has started!", referring to the slightly absurd situation which we had found ourselves in as we watched the refugees scrambling in their attempts to find a suitable piece of clothing, with humanitarians rushing after them in order to offer the services of their organisations, as if it was precisely what they had to offer which constituted the most appropriate form of assistance. For example, if the items being distributed were food packets prepared according to the child's age, this would mean that the workers had to identify their potential users, promote their products and offer the service of providing baby food to the parents who were rushing through the camp on their way to the train. The quick passage through the camp, the stress caused by the conditions of mass displacement and the lack of skill in Arabic, Persian, Pashto or other languages which could be used to communicate with the refugees most certainly

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did not contribute to the efficiency of the "consumer dynamic" (Škokić and Jambrešić Kirin 2017:92) in the relationship of "giving" and "receiving" aid. Although the goal was not to sell the service, the job required an almost identical type of entrepreneurial creativity and clever promotion as would be expected in the actual service sector.

I can recall numerous unexpected situations from the camp, such as the competitive, and almost rival-like, relations between the humanitarians, especially if the organisations concerned were involved in the realisation of the same or similar type of programme. Humanitarian workers were required to provide as much aid as possible, at the same time making sure that they have made adequate note in their statistical reports of the packets distributed or other, non-material forms of assistance provided, all the while dutifully following the rules set by the managers of the camp. Sometimes, two organisations would not agree on the results of the vulnerability assessment, the method of handling a specific case, or would simply both be interested in helping the same group of refugees, due to which they would occasionally find themselves competing with one another. For example, when I was talking to one of the interlocutors, we recalled the relationship between the workers of two organisations whose primary goal was to provide aid to infants and mothers. As the two organisations were working on a very similar programme in the same humanitarian tent, when members of one organisation would take in a mother-child pair – i.e. when they would put the baby boy or girl on the changing table and look for the appropriate diapers and clothes, while the mother was instructed to sit and rest for a while – their colleagues from the rival organisation would be standing with their backs towards them, and would conduct an interview with the mother, which they would then record in their statistical reports as "aid provided". This, of course, further sparked their rivalry, and the workers would find themselves faced with an ethical dilemma with regard to the manner of reporting, i.e. the problem of duplication, along with potentially creating additional pressure due to the smaller amount of provided aid recorded in the report forms. Competition would arise even between organisations whose programmes did not overlap with one another, and this would most often be the result of the desire to secure a better position in the social, political and business hierarchy of the camp:

> "It's as if we are working in the same company – with five other companies.
> We are working on the same project and we have the same goal, but that's
> not what matters; we're wearing different T-shirts, different colours and we
> won't agree to sharing with others."[11]

The competitive nature of the relationship between the organisations was, in most cases, the result of donor policies and the mandates of the organisations in charge

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[11] D. T., 11 November 2018.

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of defining the contents of humanitarian packets and/or aid. Although the goal of the humanitarians was to provide assistance, they had to do it in a way which mandated that they distribute as many aid packets and services to as many refugees as possible, all the while accounting for how they chose to spend the grants received from the donors financing the programme. Records and reports were made on a daily, weekly and monthly basis, and were mostly used as indicators proving that, due to the large number of refugees in need of assistance, this type of service was still required. If the reports were in any way deemed unsatisfactory, the staff were reminded of the importance of keeping regular, truthful and measurable notes on "distributed aid". These processes shaped daily work life at the camp and defined the approach to performing aid work, along with defining the topics of meetings and informal conversations during the regular briefings of the humanitarian organisations. Furthermore, we were dealing with rapid passage of people and required efficient distribution under such transitory circumstances. It is even more important to keep in mind that for many humanitarian workers the successful operation of the camp, an appropriate position for the organisation and better results in the statistical reports also meant the extension of their contracts.

HUMANITARIAN WORK AS EMPLOYMENT

Although one of the most frequent assumptions about humanitarian work is that it is highly emotionally taxing, seeing that it requires engagement with vulnerable social groups such as refugees and migrants, the ethnography of work in the humanitarian sector also shows that its demanding nature is also the result of the employees' attempts to comply with the often restrictive protocols and prohibitions, coupled with the necessity of learning the rules of the camp economy and developing one's managerial skills in order to be able to coordinate humanitarian teams and implement the organisation's programmes, regardless of whether this will actually meet the needs of the migrants in a meaningful way. Discontent and feelings of negativity among the workers in the camp were often the result of such restrictions, as well as of the hierarchical organisational relationship, both of which could end up being detrimental to the provision of aid or disruptive to the manner and potential outreach of the assistance provided:

"People on all sides are feeling frustrated. You are restricted by bureaucracy, these rules which you are obliged to follow. (...) It seems to me that the majority, especially the largest organisations, are only in it for themselves. A large bureaucratic machine. Some of the other organisations had much more... You could decide on the spot whether something was required or not. (...). In our case, you are not allowed to

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do anything that goes beyond the scope of the project, even if you can clearly see that somebody needs it."[12]

Seeing that this was paid work – for some, it meant career progression, while for others, mostly local workers, it provided existential security, if only for a temporary period – the ability of a worker to meet the demands of their superiors, to surmount the antagonism between providing assistance and doing work, and to keep on distributing aid in the disturbing environment of a refugee camp was considered professional conduct, and that person was deemed an excellent employee. Although this may have come as a surprise to some humanitarians, it should be noted that in the eyes of the more experienced workers, these challenges were all but familiar and mostly seen as part of the usual processes of the aid industry. Furthermore, one of my interlocutors explained that the tendency to see this type of engagement as work, rather than the philanthropic endeavour of an individual or a way to fulfil one's desire to help others (cf. Malkki 2015), was also a method used by the workers to protect themselves from professional burnout, compassion fatigue (cf. ibid.), social closeness, or even from having to face the discontent of the beneficiaries of aid in case their needs were not met:

> "This should be seen as work. One of the reasons why I can get through to people is because I immediately explain that I am a worker, an employee. (...) I receive a salary for my work, and I am happy if I do it well. Coincidentally, it just so happens that this work means that you receive something that is called humanitarian aid."[13]

Based on the above, it can be concluded that, along with the previously described political and economic structure of humanitarian aid, the professionalism of the humanitarian work in Slavonski Brod manifested itself through the personal abilities of workers to control their affective states and fully rationalise their own relationship with the receivers of aid, whereby they decided to treat them as the users of a service the quality of which they could not be held fully accountable for. If the habitus of a professional humanitarian worker is based on the rationalisation of aid, which, as I have described earlier in the text, has many negative effects, the questions which remain to be answered are: how do the workers themselves, on a personal level, chose to adapt to or resist the demands of an authoritarian humanitarian policy, and in what aspects of the transformation of humanitarianism can the aftereffects of the overall transformation of work in a post-industrial economy be observed?

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[12] K. B., 15 November 2018.
[13] M., 10 November 2018.

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CONCLUSION

Although it initially appeared in the form of a specific set of emotions and was expressed as the imperative of assuming moral responsibility for helping others, since the 1990s humanitarianism has become an almost ideological project based around the provision of aid to the victims of conflict, forced displacement, natural disasters, and, generally speaking, all groups whose life is in danger, simultaneously characterised by the adoption of the business discourse of management and its focus on efficiency and the optimisation of the relationship between providers and receivers of aid. Although it is still perceived as an impartial system of international aid and charitable organisations, the politicisation of humanitarian aid, the bureaucratisation of organisations and the drift towards the concept of humanitarian work as business are all becoming increasingly obvious issues (cf. Weiss 2013). The different manifestations of humanitarian politics in the camp in Slavonski Brod are most evident in examples of how the organisation of aid was based on the application of neoliberal business procedures, e.g. the commodification of aid and the competitive relations between humanitarians, but also in examples which reveal the dependence of humanitarian activity on political actors and the process of securitisation of contemporary migration and refugeness. While the transformation of humanitarianism might have had as its goal, among other things, the minimalisation of the negative results of inefficiently distributed aid, it has also brought about a situation in which humanitarians are becoming more focused on the realisation of projects, rather than trying to meet the needs of the receivers of aid. However, the very heterogenous group of people working in the humanitarian sector is most often represented from the perspective of humanitarian ideology, and not from the perspective of different existential, labour-related and personal aspects. This paper, therefore, suggests that a proper understanding of humanitarian work would require a thorough analysis of work experiences, which could then be used to contribute to the interpretation, as well as the confirmation or rejection, of the assumed notion of humanitarians as unbiased benefactors and apolitical philanthropists who are completely unaware of their own position of power.

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